United Nations A/C.4/54/SR.15

General Assembly
Fifty-fourth session

Official Records

Distr.: General
17 December 1999
English
Original: Russian

Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee)

Summary record of the 15th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 27 October 1999, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Semakula Kiwanuka (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Uganda)

Contents

Agenda item 87: International cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space (*continued*)

This record is subject to correction. Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned *within one week of the date of publication* to the Chief of the Official Records Editing Section, room DC2-750, 2 United Nations Plaza, and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrections will be issued after the end of the session, in a separate corrigendum for each Committee.

99-81905 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 87: International cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space (*continued*) (A/54/20; A/C.4/54/8; A/CONF.184/6)

1. **Mr. Dausa Cespedes** (Cuba) said that the concept of outer space as the common world heritage encompassed three main principles which should be defended by all States. The first principle was the necessity to preserve outer space exclusively for peaceful uses and to promote international cooperation in the use of outer space for such purposes, taking into account the imperative of achieving continued economic growth and sustainable development for all countries, in particular developing countries. As the new millennium neared, it was necessary to bridge the enormous gap dividing the vast majority of developing countries and the industrialized countries in the peaceful uses of outer space. Second, and just as important, was the need to prevent an arms race in outer space. In that connection, his delegation strongly objected to the fact that some nuclear Powers, which were also space Powers, were hindering the possibility of making progress within the framework of the Conference on Disarmament on the negotiation of an international treaty or instrument aimed at preventing an arms race in outer space. The third principle related to space law. His country shared the view that the legal regime currently applicable to outer space could not guarantee the prevention of an arms race in outer space, and it was therefore imperative to adopt new measures with adequate and effective verifying provisions.

2. The will and capability of contributing to the work of the Committee should be the single element to be taken into account when appointing its members.

3. The Committee's primary tasks were to develop affordable and appropriate techniques in order to minimize the potential consequences of space debris, as well as to give more attention to collisions of space objects, in particular those with nuclear power sources, with space debris.

4. His delegation noted with concern the attempts to revise the principles governing the use of nuclear power in outer space without taking into account the concerns of all countries, particularly the developing countries. His delegation again reiterated that such actions could represent a danger for mankind.

5. In the past decade, Cuba had sent the first Latin American into outer space. That had helped the country to develop and implement various investigations of great interest for Cuba's economic development. In that connection, his delegation attached great importance to strengthening regional cooperation with the objective of developing space-related research and also cooperation within the framework of the United Nations and the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS).

6. **Mr. Haggag** (Egypt) said that the adoption of General Assembly resolution 1348 (XIII) establishing COPUOS had been a historic event, as that Committee was the only body concerned with international cooperation in the field of the peaceful uses of outer space. Five important space treaties had been concluded, and a number of important legal principles had been established relating to research into outer space. In 1999 the Third United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space had been held, at which the Vienna Declaration on Space and Human Development had been adopted. It had established a firm basis for the application of space technology and the protection of the space environment, promoting development, education and training and public information on various aspects of space activity.

7. Egypt was very interested in the work of the Conference and hoped that all States would take the necessary measures to implement its recommendations and that the General Assembly, as provided for in paragraph 4 of the Vienna Declaration on Space and Human Development, would, after a period of five years, review and evaluate the implementation of the recommendations of UNISPACE III. His delegation confirmed the importance of expanding the scope of application and use of space technology in the developing countries and welcomed the recommendations of the Vienna Declaration concerning the establishment of a special voluntary United Nations fund for the purpose of implementing the recommendations of UNISPACE III. His delegation was also concerned that COPUOS should continue to take steps to enhance the scientific research potential of the developing countries and to expand their capacity to receive the necessary data on the application of space technology in various fields, including agriculture, industry, health care and remote sensing. In that connection, General Assembly resolution 51/122 of 13 December 1996 had special significance, as it contained a Declaration on International Cooperation in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space for the Benefit and in the Interest of All States, Taking into Particular Account the Needs of Developing Countries.

8. In view of Egypt's interest in the development of space science and technology, it had established, within the framework of the Ministry of Scientific Research, a Council on Space Science and Technology, which would be responsible for the development of a national programme for

the peaceful uses of outer space. The main elements of that programme would be the use of satellite technology to study the desert, the training of scientific personnel and the establishment of national scientific institutions in Egypt, and international cooperation to develop a space programme in Egypt and the use of the most advanced space technologies to develop local industry. In that field there had recently been a number of achievements, including the launching of the Egyptian satellite "Nilsat 1", which was to be used for television transmission. Preparations were being made to launch the "Nilsat 2" satellite. A ground station would also be built in the next year.

9. His delegation fully supported the efforts of COPUOS to set up a normative legal basis to regulate space exploration and to ensure that it was used exclusively for peaceful purposes. In that connection, the Committee would in the future play a central role in the development of norms of space law and international agreements on the application of space technology for peaceful purposes. It also hoped that the Committee would expand and strengthen all aspects of cooperation between States in those areas at the regional and international levels.

10. **Mr. Joedo** (Indonesia) said that the use of space technology had proved invaluable for monitoring changes in the environment, as well as evaluating, exploring and managing the exploitation of natural and non-renewable resources. Those techniques were needed to predict global weather changes and ocean movements and to improve the overall quality of life for humankind.

11. The role of COPUOS was of paramount importance in translating international cooperation into meaningful programmes on the regional, subregional and national levels, thereby leading to tangible results. His delegation welcomed the Vienna Declaration on Space and Human Development and hoped that its provisions would be implemented. Space science and the related technologies constituted an important tool to overcome the obstacles of the next millennium. It was important to ensure that the infinite resources of outer space were utilized for the interests of all mankind.

12. At the present time, cooperation at all levels was not simply an arena for global development, but an imperative necessity. The time had come to expand cooperation between nations and to make it more effective. Space research could help to meet the current challenges and obstacles. It was vital to maintain effective channels of cooperation, so that the international community could marshal its concerted endeavours to ensure access to technology, including its transfer, use and development, while at the same time sharing information, training and education. The holding of regional seminars, conferences and in-depth training sponsored by the United Nations in the framework of space applications programmes were substantive methods to implement the opportunities for the future.

13. With regard to the work of the Legal Subcommittee, he noted that the item concerning the question of review of the Principles Relevant to the Use of Nuclear Power Sources in Outer Space had been retained on the agenda.

14. Indonesia, as an equatorial country and a developing country, had always attached great importance to the question of the geostationary orbit. Assured access to the geostationary orbit, at the present time and in the future, had to be guaranteed. It was important to define a legal regime for its use. It would be useful for COPUOS to continue its discussions on that matter, taking into account the legal and political implications.

15. **Ms. Rusu** (Romania) said that the first United Nations space conference since the end of the cold war (UNISPACE III), held in Vienna in July 1999, had concluded with the adoption of some important documents, which contained a blueprint for the peaceful uses of outer space in the twenty-first century. The Vienna Declaration on Space and Human Development and its related plan of action were the result of a fruitful process of consultation between decision-makers and international experts designed to identify ways of making better use of space-technology developments for the benefit of all mankind.

16. The regional preparatory conference for Eastern Europe, held in Bucharest in January 1999, had enabled the participating States to identify, in the light of the objectives of UNISPACE III, the issues of priority and specific interest for the region. Mention must be made in that connection of the establishment of the network of space science and technology education and research institutions for Central-Eastern and South-Eastern Europe. Scientific experiments using instruments developed by Romanian scientists had been carried out in a number of international space missions. Important scientific results had been obtained in astrophysics, fundamental space science, earth environment studies, microgravity research, thermal elasticity, and information processing.

17. Romania attached a great importance to regional and international cooperation to promote dialogue and development. In that connection it welcomed the cooperation agreement concluded in October 1999 between the European Space Agency and the Romanian Government and the signing at the end of October in Sofia of a regional cooperation agreement between Hungary, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Greece, Poland, the Slovak Republic,

Turkey and Romania. It also looked forward eagerly to the completion of the negotiation of a cooperation agreement between the Romanian Government and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).

18. Romania saluted the progress achieved in the establishment of regional centres for space science and technology education in other regions, including Asia and the Pacific, Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean. Regional and international cooperation was the most promising way of sharing the benefits of space technology among all countries with a view to promoting their progress.

19. **Mr. Rayani** (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that UNISPACE III had emphasized the importance of providing the developing countries with opportunities to use the latest achievements of space science and technology for the purposes of economic development and for forecasting natural disasters, especially since outer space was not the exclusive property of any individual State but the common heritage of mankind.

20. Libya was genuinely interested in using outer space for peaceful purposes, especially from the standpoint of the benefits which such activity could bring mankind in the fight against desertification, in environmental protection, and in economic affairs. In that connection a welcome must be given to the results of UNISPACE III, held from 19 to 30 July 1999 in Vienna. His delegation had taken part in the Conference and had submitted a national report stating Libya's interest in establishing a national remote sensing and space research centre. The report also described ways and means of removing the obstacles to the development of scientific and technological cooperation and proposed measures for creating a national potential and strengthening cooperation with the centres and specialized institutions of other countries. An appeal must also be made for the curtailment of military spending in outer space, so that the resources thus released could be directed to the solution of the problems of the developing countries.

21. Libya supported the proposal for the creation of a special voluntary United Nations fund for implementation of the recommendations of UNISPACE III and the declaration of an international week to publicize the importance of the peaceful use of outer space. It also hoped that the developing countries would receive the necessary assistance to establish national institutions and committees to process the technology transferred by the developed countries. It also emphasized the importance of refusing to use outer space for military purposes and curbing the arms race in outer space. There must be full cooperation in that area between COPUOS and the Disarmament Commission. It had to be pointed out that some of the international activities of the big Powers constituted a threat to the developing countries. Libya reiterated its interest in the plan of action for space research and the peaceful use of outer space.

22. **Mr. Hodgkins** (United States of America) said that since the fifty-third session of the General Assembly COPUOS had recorded a number of significant achievements in promoting international space cooperation. The past year of accomplishment marked more than 40 years of service by COPUOS to the world community.

23. In 1958, soon after the launching of a satellite had imparted new intensity to the cold war, the General Assembly had taken a decision to create the Ad Hoc Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space in the hope of channelling the use of outer space towards constructive activities and preventing an arms race in outer space. Recognizing that the exploration of outer space held both promise and danger, States had tried to erect a structure which would foster mutually advantageous cooperation in that field. Since then COPUOS had been the only standing body of the General Assembly devoted to the attainment of that goal. While other United Nations organs, including the First Committee, held mandates to consider the military uses of outer space, COPUOS offered a forum focused exclusively on promoting the cooperative achievement of benefits from space exploration. During the four decades of its existence COPUOS had made a contribution to the development and adoption of five major outer space treaties and the establishment of valuable standards, which had acquired the status of international principles and generated a new branch of international law. COPUOS also played an important role in expanding the exchange of information among developed and developing countries on the latest advances in space exploration.

24. The United States space programme had been born at roughly the same time as COPUOS, at the height of the cold war and the intense rivalry for missile and space supremacy. Over time, fortunately, that context had changed, and the United States now saw its space activities primarily as an instrument of human advancement and international cooperation. It had sent its astronauts to the Moon, robots to Mars, and spacecraft to the farthest reaches of the solar system, but today it was engaged in a partnership with 16 other nations on the unique project to build an international space station. The United States space programme was headed by two institutions. It had begun in 1958 with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, which had recorded tremendous achievements in aeronautics and space research. In 1970 the United States had added the National

Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, which, among its many other functions, operated weather satellites. The year 2000 would mark the fortieth anniversary of the launch of TIROS I, the first weather satellite and the first in a continuous string of polar-orbiting environmental monitors.

25. The Third United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (UNISPACE III), which the Office of Outer Space Affairs had had a major part in organizing, had been an event worthy of being the last major United Nations conference of the century. It should serve as a model within the United Nations system for the adoption of innovative methods to deal with issues of global concern. For that reason, among others, the report of the Secretariat on organizational matters relating to UNISPACE III was welcome, since it could provide guidelines for other United Nations bodies convening events that addressed important global issues, while keeping costs within existing resources. The Conference had succeeded in considering a wide range of topics with the extensive involvement of leading scientists, government officials and private sector representatives. His delegation noted with satisfaction that the report of the Conference contained recommendations and conclusions that supported its overall objectives for the Conference, including broader participation in activities related to the monitoring of the Earth and its environment; the identification of new areas conducive to international cooperation; increased support for existing international cooperation mechanisms; dissemination of information on space research areas and strategies for developing countries; improved coordination and less duplication among United Nations organizations involved in space activities; strengthened regional space cooperation; and the promotion of civil and commercial applications and use of outer space. His delegation was also pleased with the progress made on restructuring the work of the Committee and its Subcommittees and the new approaches to considering agenda items. Space exploration was entering a new era involving unprecedented cooperation on the International Space Station, cutting-edge technologies and innovative private and government arrangements.

26. **Mr. González** (Chile), speaking on behalf of the countries of the Common Market of the Southern Cone (MERCOSUR), said that the various conferences on the uses of outer space held over the past few years had led to an extensive informal plan of cooperation among the MERCOSUR countries and the associated countries of Bolivia and Chile, particularly in the academic and technical fields. There was still, however, no clear awareness of the scope and implications of the applications of space technology for current and future generations. The links between those applications and the achievement of human development and sustainable security, based on the application of the best technological tools, would make it possible to achieve higher standards of living. One of the essential elements in that respect was the protection of the Earth's environment and the management of its resources. Also crucial was the promotion of literacy and education in rural areas by improving and coordinating satellite-delivered educational programmes and infrastructure.

27. International cooperation played an essential role in that regard. Minimum conditions must be established to enable all Member States to tackle such major problems as extreme poverty with the most effective technological instruments available, the most important being space technology. The decision of UNISPACE III to establish a voluntary United Nations fund for the purpose of implementing its recommendations, particularly those concerning the activities of the regional training centres in space science and technology, was merely a reaffirmation at the global level of the powerful, sustained and systematic use that must be made of the applications of space technology.

28. Paradoxically, many countries possessed an enormous quantity of data but very limited means of processing it. It was therefore important that they should gain access to information on economic and social development. Efforts to ensure that space technology was used as a practical and effective tool to resolve the problems of humanity must continue. Action to reduce the effects of natural disasters was urgently needed to prevent or at least mitigate the complete or partial destruction of geographical regions which were frequently inhabited by the poorest populations. In that connection, it was essential to examine together the establishment of clearer and more practical legal norms or political arrangements which would enable people in various countries to live in increasing security and improve their chances of achieving progress under equal conditions.

29. The representatives of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, and of the MERCOSUR countries and the associated States, reaffirmed the importance of continued progress in the elaboration of standards contributing to the development of international space law and urged the States of the region to sign and ratify the relevant multilateral instruments. The MERCOSUR countries believed that it would be appropriate for the 1996 Declaration on International Cooperation in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space for the Benefit and in the Interest of All States, Taking into Particular Account the Needs of Developing Countries to be transformed into a solemn declaration at the next session of the General Assembly. They therefore

proposed that the issue should be considered by the Legal Subcommittee of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space at its next session.

30. **Mr. Deirki** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the exploitation of outer space was moving at ever greater speed both quantitatively and qualitatively, reflecting humankind's aspiration to derive real scientific and economic benefits from what was a relatively new direction for the development of civilization. His delegation welcomed the trend towards broadening the scope of the peaceful uses of outer space, particularly for the benefit of developing countries, and expressed satisfaction at the decrease in military expenditure for space purposes. Outer space was increasingly being used for the resolution of the most important economic, environmental and medical challenges confronting the whole of humankind.

31. His delegation was extremely interested in the problems relating to the peaceful uses of outer space, as had been demonstrated by the participation of a Syrian astronaut in a space flight and by the work of the Syrian Arab Republic on remote sensing.

32. Clearly, if humankind was to achieve its stated aims in the peaceful uses of outer space, the whole international community must strive to honour existing agreements. Space law must, however, be developed further towards a total prohibition on the use of outer space for the further escalation of the arms race. It would therefore be useful for the Committee and the Conference on Disarmament to coordinate their work. More serious efforts should also be made to resolve the problems of space debris, particularly in the context of achieving nuclear security in outer space. The major role in that respect must be played by States with nuclear facilities in space. Such States should provide other countries with sufficient information on orbits, construction and the fuel used, as well as on measures being taken to provide guarantees that such facilities posed no danger to other countries.

33. **Mr. Yan Yahaya** (Malaysia) welcomed the positive achievements of UNISPACE III, including the adoption of the Vienna Declaration on Space and Human Development, which was an important contribution to the development of space science and technology for peaceful purposes, to the enhancement of international cooperation in outer space and to the promotion of the economic development of all Member States. Malaysia fully concurred with the recommendations in the Declaration and believed that immediate action should be taken to establish a special voluntary fund to implement them.

34. All Member States, including Malaysia, benefited from the promotion of the peaceful uses of outer space which, along with its related technologies, had brought tremendous benefits to their overall development. It was encouraging that special attention had been given to space applications for environmentally sound and sustainable development. Member States must continue to support the Committee in its efforts to strengthen international cooperation for the peaceful use of outer space, including through further development of international space law.

35. With regard to Malaysia's recent achievements in space technology development and its utilization for peaceful purposes, mention should be made of the launching of two telecommunications satellites (MEASAT 1 and 2) three years previously. In addition, in collaboration with the United Kingdom, Malaysia had built its first micro satellite, TiungSAT-1, whose launching was unfortunately much delayed because of the unavailability of launch opportunities for small satellites. The scarcity and cost of launch opportunities for small satellites would negate their affordability and limit the number of countries that would develop and advance such technology. Nevertheless, Malaysia had embarked on the design of a second micro satellite for low earth orbit at the equator.

36. With regard to training and education, Malaysia had hosted a number of international training workshops on remote sensing and satellite technology. Several of its universities were offering degree courses in space technology such as remote sensing, astronomy and astrophysics. Space science was currently part of the formal science curriculum at schools in Malaysia. As a new participant in the space arena and conscious of the limitations of its resources, Malaysia would actively seek international cooperation and collaboration in all aspects of space activity, while at the same time vigorously nurturing its own indigenous capacity in that important area.

37. **Mr. Baissa** (Yemen) said that, although the use of outer space might seem impossible for many developing countries and particularly for the least developed ones, those countries were aware that it would be dangerous to fall behind in that area and to limit themselves to the role of mere observers. In that connection, the United Nations was becoming increasingly important in eliminating the widening gap between developed and developing countries.

38. The militarization of outer space, sometimes unilaterally, was having negative consequences. Attention should be concentrated on the peaceful aspects of the conquest of outer space. In that connection, Yemen welcomed the financial and technical assistance provided

by various States and organizations to developing countries and particularly to the least developed countries, in order to facilitate their participation in the measures currently under discussion. The organization of regional and international conferences, symposia, seminars and workshops was important in that connection. In addition, the establishment on a mutually beneficial basis of regional centres of knowledge in the area of space science and technology facilitated access to specialized knowledge and skilled assistance.

39. Yemen welcomed the success of UNISPACE III and the adoption of conclusions and recommendations at the Conference. Outer space was the common property of mankind and should therefore be utilized by the developing countries, which on the threshold of the third millennium were trying to solve problems of social and economic development and to prevent natural disasters. The establishment of the necessary machinery was important for international cooperation in that area: consultative arrangements within the Committee, as well as a United Nations voluntary fund to implement the conclusions and recommendations of UNISPACE III and of the regional conferences. If the ever-widening gap between developing and developed countries was to be closed, new sources of financing must be sought and international cooperation organized on a multilateral basis.

40. For the developing countries, the conquest of outer space was one of the means of attaining their goals. Of course, that was still a daydream and a long and thorny path remained to be travelled before it could be made a reality. Ingenuity and resourcefulness were required in order to expedite that process. In that connection, a role could be played by literacy campaigns, promotion of education, particularly in rural areas, coordination of educational curricula and establishment of infrastructures for the use of space technology.

41. **Mr. Tarabrin** (Russian Federation) said that his country's space activities promoted Russia's scientific and economic interests, in accordance with national space policy and with the Federation's space programme for the period up to the year 2000, in which an important place was also devoted to international cooperation. The orbital network of spacecraft operated by Russia was carrying out assignments in a range of basic areas, including implementation of international agreements, organization of manned orbital flights and operation of new industrial technology in space, conduct of basic scientific research, creation of global communications and television broadcasting throughout the territory of Russia, and also environmental monitoring and disaster management.

42. With regard to the manned space programme, during the long lifetime of the Mir space station a programme of research and experiments had been implemented covering a broad spectrum of subject fields, with the participation of foreign astronauts under various international programmes. The Russian-American Mir-Shuttle and Mir-NASA joint programmes were important events which, as the first phase of the project to establish the International Space Station, had enabled the partners to acquire invaluable experience in the conduct of joint long-duration flights. As part of the practical arrangements for this project, in November 1998 Russia had launched the first module Zarya. Preparations were currently under way for the launch of another Russian Zvezda module. At the same time, a preliminary expert examination was being conducted and proposals were being selected for a programme of pure and applied research on board the Russian segment of the International Space Station.

43. The launch by Russian carrier rockets of foreign payloads was an important and rapidly developing area of Russia's space activity. One of the most outstanding achievements in the realm of international cooperation had been the construction of a unique marine cosmodrome and the first launching of a satellite from it under the international Sea Launch programme. Russia was trying to make its space activities socially and economically significant and, with that aim, was engaging in the active industrial application of the latest scientific and technical advances in the area of rocket and space technology.

44. The increase in the number of participants in space activities and the extensive commercialization of such activities were radically altering the scale and character of States' activities for the peaceful use of outer space. Accordingly, the work of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space should take into account the new requirements. The international community needed the Committee, buttressed by adequate powers. Not only should the existing status and role of the Committee in the formulation of political and legal principles governing space activities be preserved, but its functions of coordinating and regulating international cooperation in space should be strengthened.

45. UNISPACE III had been a milestone in the development of international cooperation in that sphere. It had reaffirmed the unconditional preservation of the peaceful character of the use of space and the conduct of space activities in the interests of all humankind and of maintaining international peace and security. It had also noted the need to modernize the institutes of international space law existing under the auspices of the United Nations,

in view of the rapid development of entrepreneurial activity in space, so as to strike a balance between commercial motivations and the need to prevent harm in space and to take into account the interests of the world community as a whole.

46. Russia was firmly convinced that the successful development of international cooperation in space on a regional and bilateral basis and its establishment on a long-term legal foundation were no substitute for the progressive development and modification of universal norms and principles of such cooperation. That was currently the important and very timely task of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space.

The meeting rose at 11.55 a.m.